

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

EB-07 COME-00 SIL-01 LAB-04 HEW-02 OES-03 OMB-01

MED-02 /089 W

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R 201727Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5728

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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PASS DEPT OF LABOR AND HEW

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, SMCI, UK

SUBJECT: BARBARA CASTLE VS. THE DOCTORS

REF: LONDON 15796

SUMMARY - AS THE DISPUTE BETWEEN BRITISH DOCTORS AND THE
NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE GROWS IN INTENSITY, MRS. BARBARA

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CASTLE, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES,

CHARGED THAT THE DOCTORS WERE TRANSFORMING THEIR DIFFERENCES INTO A "PERSONALIZED AND VERY NEAR POLITICAL ATTACK" ON HER. AMID SPECULATION IN THE MEDIA THAT SHE MAY BE FORCED TO RESIGN, MRS. CASTLE DECLARED THIS WAS NOT "WHAT THE GOVERNMENT OR THE LABOR PARTY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS" WAS ASKING HER TO DO. LATER TODAY, THE PRIME

MINISTER IS EXPECTED TO MAKE A STATEMENT IN THE COMMONS ON HIS PROPOSED INQUIRY INTO THE HEALTH SERVICE -- AN INQUIRY WHICH HAS ANGERED DOCTORS SINCE IT WILL NOT CONSIDER THE VERY DIVISIVE ISSUE OF PRIVATE PRACTICE IN NHS HOSPITALS -- --- THE "PAY-BED" QUESTION (REFTEL). END SUMMARY.

1. MRS. CASTLE MADE HER STATEMENTS ON WEEKEND TELEVISION AS THE MULTI-FACETED CONTROVERSY OVER THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE CONTINUES TO GROW. SIXTY HOSPITALS HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN AFFECTED BY THE DISPUTE OVER OVERTIME PAY (REFTEL) AS JUNIOR HOSPITAL DOCTORS IN SCORES OF HOSPITALS AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE ENGAGING IN UNOFFICIAL OVERTIME BANS -- EXCEPT FOR EMERGENCY CASES. THE LARGEST NUMBER OF THESE DOCTORS -- ABOUT 15,000 -- ARE REPRESENTED BY THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION'S JUNIOR STAFF COMMITTEE, WHILE THE BALANCE -- ABOUT 4,000 -- ARE MEMBERS OF A MORE MILITANT JUNIOR HOSPITAL DOCTOR'S ASSOCIATION (JHDA). THE BMA IS BALLOTING THE DOCTORS ON THEIR POSITION IN THE DISPUTE. DR. GREY-TURNER, DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION TOLD US THAT, DEPENDING ON THE RESULT OF THE BALLOT, THE BMA MAY CONSIDER INVOKING OFFICIAL "SANCTIONS" WHICH HE AGREED COULD BE "FAIRLY DEVASTATING." THE JHDA HAS SET A TIME LIMIT OF FOUR WEEKS FOR AN IMPROVEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFER, AFTER WHICH IT WILL ALSO DECIDE WHETHER TO INVOKE OFFICIAL NATION-WIDE INDUSTRIAL ACTION BY ITS MEMBERS. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT MAY AGREE TO SOME IMPROVEMENT IN THE OFFER, IT WILL NOT DO ANYTHING WHICH IS SEEN TO BREACH ITS ANTI-INFLATION POLICY.

2. THE DECISION LAST WEEK BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO SET UP A ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO LOOK INTO THE OPERA-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TION AND FINANCING OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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WILL NOT DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF PAY-BEDS AT ALL SINCE
THE GOVERNMENT IS CURRENTLY DETERMINED TO PHASE THEM OUT.
THUS, THE PAY-BED ISSUE REMAINS EVEN MORE PERVASIVELY
BITTER AND INTRACTABLE. AS JOE ROGALY (FINANCIAL TIMES,
OCTOBER 20) SUCCINCTLY STATES THE ISSUE: "FOR WHAT THE
SECRETARY FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES IS SAYING, IN EFFECT,;
'YOU (THE DOCTORS) AGREE TO A SYSTEM OF RATIONING FOR THE
PRIVATE SECTOR OF MEDICINE. IF YOU DO NOT, I'LL DO MY
BEST TO STRANGLE IT.'" (BY RATIONING ROGALLY IS REFER-
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RING TO A LICENSING SYSTEM -- SEE REFTEL -- WHICH WOULD ALLOW PRIVATE DOCTORS TO PAY FOR CERTAIN SPECIALIZED NHS FACILITIES, SUCH AS RADIO-THERAPY NEEDING COSTLY CAPITAL EQUIPMENT,) IF THE DOCTORS REJECT THIS CONCEPT, ROGALLY ADDS: "THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR (THAN) TO GO IT ALONE ABSOLUTELY AND LITERALLY." WHILE THIS IS DIFFICULT, HE INDICATES HOW IT IS POSSIBLE AND, FURTHERMORE, HE POSES THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR, WHICH IS NOW A SMALL ONE, "COULD START TO GROW INTO SOMETHING MUCH LARGER IF NOTHING WERE DONE TO STOP IT." AND SINCE SUCH GROWTH IS THE LAST THING WHICH MRS. CASTLE WOULD LIKE TO SEE, ROGALLY SUGGESTS THE NEED FOR A COMPROMISE TO BE REACHED WHICH WOULD AT LEAST SLOW DOWN THE PACE NHS PHASEOUT OF PRIVATE BEDS -- A GESTURE' HE SAYS, ..WHICH COULD TRANQUILIZE SOME OF THE DOCTORS."

3. COMMENT: FOR MANY, THE NHS CRISIS LIKE OTHER MAJOR ISSUES -- SUCH AS EDUCATION OR GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRIVATE ENTERPRISE -- HAS SIMPLY EXACERBATED DIVISIONS WITHIN THE COUNTRY. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION MAY OFTEN BE FAR LESS THAN THE LABOR PARTY LEFT-WING SEEKS (THE EXTREME LEFT-WING, FOR EXAMPLE, BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN RID OF PAY-BEDS LONG AGO). BUT ITS "MODERATE" COMPROMISE IS UNACCEPTABLE TO MANY. BARBARA CASTLE IS FIGHTING DOCTORS TODAY, REG PRENTICE BATTLED EDUCATORS AND TONY BENN FOUGHT INDUSTRY YESTERDAY. TOMORROW IT MAY BE ANOTHER MINISTER -- CARRYING OUT THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY -- WHO IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF A CONTROVERSY. CONSENSUS SOLUTIONS APPEAR AS REMOTE AS EVER.

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